

18 January 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: The Spelling of Cambodian Place Names

1. The attached, which just landed on my desk, brings to mind a matter I have been meaning to mention to you for some time. As you may or may not be aware, the Board of Geographic Names -- in its scholarly wisdom -- has recently seen fit to issue an almost completely new set of spellings for the names of Cambodian towns, provinces and other geographic features. Phnom Penh remains the same, but practically everything else appears in a new guise. Skoun, for example, is now Skon, Siem Reap has become Siem Reab, Stung Treng has become Stoeng Treng and Kompong Sam has become Kompong Saom.
2. I am sure the new Anglicized spellings are much more scholarly renditions of the Sanskrit-Pali based originals and scholarship, as we know, is a splendid thing. Nonetheless, I wonder if this venture into pure orthography at this time was really necessary. Our masters had enough trouble with the old names, which they were just beginning to become acquainted with, and are almost certain to be perplexed when faced with a new set. One's natural inclination on first encountering the new spelling is to wonder what place is being discussed or whether some typist has gone berserk.
3. Given the current amount of high-level attention devoted to Cambodia these days, I think you ought to consider taking one of two actions:

a. Tell the geographers to keep their scholarship on ice until Cambodia passes out of the limelight and have us all revert to the names with which we were just becoming familiar even though their Anglicized renditions might be puristically imperfect; or

b. Have Ed Proctor distribute throughout the community and the government a formal notice explaining the new spellings and their rationale and assuring those who read material dealing with Cambodia that neither their typewriters nor their typists are beset by gremlins.

George A. Carver, Jr.
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

Attachment

"CAMBODIA -- Provincial Maps -- October 1971"

25X1

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1 - GAC Chrono ✓
1 - Memos TO & FROM DCI